

Apple Arcade isn't the only subscription: GameClub revives old iOS games

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- A screenshot from *Mage Gauntlet*, one of the games on GameClub.
- There are individual game pages in GameClub with screenshots, trailers, and other info—they look similar to Apple's App Store pages.

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- Tapping that "Play" button takes you to the app's page in the App Store, where you then download the game normally.

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- GameClub has achievements of its own.

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- And it has its own editorial-curation feed very similar to the main one Apple maintains for the App Store.

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Yesterday saw the launch of GameClub, a long-in-development subscription-based service that revised older, deprecated iPhone games for modern software and devices. Curated by former TouchArcade Editor-in-Chief Eli Hodapp—a prominent voice in the world of mobile games who has long opined on the

need for quality premium games on the platform—the service offers a 30-day trial and will charge \$4.99 per month thereafter.

The service offers a downloadable app for managing games, but games are downloaded separately from the App Store. The GameClub app can link out to those App Store entries as you browse, however. You can subscribe directly on the device, meaning Apple will get a cut of the subscription as it does for other app subscriptions in the App Store.

Titles offered include premium iPhone and iPad classics like *Sword of Fargoal*, *Orc: Vengeance*, and *Super Crate Box*. \$4.99 per month is the same price as Apple Arcade, Apple's recently launched game-subscription service that offers around a hundred carefully curated, premium games—many from prominent creators—across all of Apple's device categories. However, work on this service had been underway long before Apple Arcade was announced.

As is the case with Apple Arcade, though, none of the games on GameClub contains ads or in-app purchases (IAP). Many are early premium hits from the App Store before timer- and IAP-based games came to dominate the charts. Some of those early classics were quite good but got left behind as the App Store transformed. Some even became unplayable on more recent devices thanks to changes to Apple's operating system and hardware. Those games have not only been updated to work on new devices but have seen upgrades like an increase in resolution.

GameClub has promised to update the service weekly with new games, though it's unclear how many will be revived classics and how many will be new titles.

Services like this and Apple Arcade might end up being more consequential for iOS than they first appear. As I noted in my review of iOS 13, Apple has long seemed displeased with the

dominance of free-to-play (F2P), retention-mechanic-based games in the App Store. Its initial volley to solve this problem was an overhaul of the App Store in iOS 11, which removed the focus from automatically generated charts and put it instead on editorial curation. Apple's editors sometimes highlighted F2P games, but they typically focused on those made with quality in mind. They also often pointed out premium games that would easily be lost in the charts otherwise.

With Arcade, Apple has introduced a new way for it to directly elevate games that are focused on positive player experiences instead of addiction mechanics and aggressive IAP revenue. Initial reactions from critics and players to the Arcade lineup have generally seemed very positive, thanks in part to Apple's focus on curating games from established, previously acclaimed or successful creators or on games that had already accumulated a great deal of interest at game festivals like IndieCade.

However, while people have praised the game selection, the service itself is barebones in terms of features. Aside from a different focus in curation, GameClub aims to offer some features that Apple Arcade does not. For example, Arcade doesn't give players or developers much insight about which games are most popular, but GameClub claims it will be "transparent" with developers about revenue, as TechCrunch noted in an interview with a GameClub executive.

In an effort to boost services revenue to counterbalance slowing iPhone sales, Apple had already been pushing developers to move toward a subscription model when it made sense. But services like Arcade and GameClub challenge long-existing assumptions about what a mobile app ecosystem looks like. If Apple and other parties were to bring similar services to non-game apps, as Google has done, the App Store could look very different in just a few short years.

Google also offered a subscription service called Google Play

Pass, but games-industry voices criticized it for directly tying engagement within the apps to revenue rather than an upfront payment to developers for inclusion. This may incentivize the wrong kinds of games, some argue. And while its lineup has some classics, it did not gather as much positive attention for curating quality new titles.

Listing image by GameClub

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